

Efforts Continue to Reach Final Agreement on RESTORE Act:

More than two years after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill racked our region, community leaders and environmental groups are still united behind the need to pass legislation to address the long-term economic and environmental recovery of the damaged areas along the five Gulf Coast states, including Alabama.

The broken BP well released 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico over a three-month period, fouling fisheries and beaches from Louisiana to Northwest Florida. While it has been 23 months since the damaged well was permanently sealed – and the nation's attention turned away from the unprecedented environmental disaster along our shores – the recovery will be underway for years to come.

Clean Water Act fines resulting from the federal government's ongoing lawsuit against BP, Transocean and other parties deemed responsible for the 2010 spill could potentially reach \$20 billion. Under current federal law, all of these penalty funds would go to the federal treasury to offset future federal oil spill clean-up costs.

However, given the widespread impact of the Deepwater Horizon spill, Gulf Coast lawmakers have been working for nearly a year to pass legislation directing the majority of these fines to Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas to be used for recovery and restoration.

Last year, I joined fellow Members of Congress from the five Gulf Coast states in introducing legislation, known as the RESTORE ACT, to steer 80 percent of future Clean Water Act fines to a newly-created Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund. The Senate introduced similar legislation in 2011.

The House was first to act, passing in February legislation that contained language voicing support for the creation of a Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund. Then, in March, the Senate passed its RESTORE language as an amendment to their version of the transportation authorization bill. Since that time, the House and Senate have been unable to agree on a final version of the transportation bill, but negotiations are ongoing.

Such disagreements over differing versions of legislation are common in Congress, and working them out in Conference Committee is part of the normal legislative process. Until now, both the House and Senate have separately voted in support of the RESTORE Act's basic provisions, but ultimately, its fate this year may be tied to a final agreement on the underlying transportation bill.

I am continuing to work with other Gulf Coast lawmakers, including Senator Jeff Sessions as well as Senator Richard Shelby who is a member of the House and Senate transportation Conference Committee, in pressing for the adoption of a transportation bill containing our RESTORE language. Action is expected before the current, temporary highway funding bill expires at the end of June.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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